

ADDRESS
OF
SENATOR HENRY WAYLAND HILL,
AT THE
MEMORIAL DAY EXERCISES
IN
CONVENTION HALL, BUFFALO, N. Y., MAY 23, 1909.

"There can be no affinity nearer than our country"—PLATO.

ALBANY
J. B. LYON COMPANY, PRINTERS
1909



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2011 with funding from

The Institute of Museum and Library Services through an Indiana State Library LSTA Grant

ADDRESS

OF

SENATOR HENRY WAYLAND HILL,

*At the Memorial Day Exercises in Convention Hall,
at Buffalo, N. Y.*

MAY 23, 1909.

*Honored Veterans of the late Civil War, Ladies and
Gentlemen:*

These impressive Memorial Ceremonies are a touching tribute to the memory of those who gave their services, and in some instances their lives in defense of their country. All classes and conditions unite annually in paying tribute to their memories, and the National Memorial Day, when men may pause in their labors to scatter floral offerings on the graves of their fallen heroes, is observed with as much formality as the anniversary of our Independence. It is well that this is so, for the preservation of the Union involved sacrifices as heroic as those made in establishing this free Republic, and those upon whom rested the burden of its preservation will rank in history along with its founders. Every battlefield of the Civil War is strewn with the bones of the loyal sons of the North, who fought as valiantly and poured out their lives in patriotic devotion as heroically as any who fell at Concord, Lexington or Bunker Hill. As time goes on the patriotic services of the Volunteer soldiers of the late Civil War will be better understood and enshrined in the hearts of the people, who from generation to generation will be taught to revere their

memories, and to transmit to others the record of their heroic services in the defense of the Union.

In the dark days of the Civil War when the perpetuity of the Nation was in doubt, there went forth from every hamlet, township and city of the North soldiers who in the aggregate numbered in the thousands, and who were the "noblest and bravest warriors that ever buckled sword."

The consecrated soil of Vicksburg, Winchester and Gettysburg, and many other battlefields, where the best life-blood of the Nation was poured out, are the common heritage of our people, and will be an inspiration to generations yet unborn to emulate the heroic and illustrious lives there sacrificed that the Nation might remain one and indivisible. For us of a later generation to have part, howsoever humble it may be, in paying tribute to such distinguished warriors who, by their personal devotion to country and heroism on the field of battle, preserved this nation and made the amenities of peace possible, with all of their resultant blessings, is an honor for any person second only to that bestowed on the heroes themselves. We should welcome the surviving veterans of the Grand Armies as enthusiastically as did Thebes through its hundred gates its conquering chariots, or Imperial Rome its victorious legions. The gallantry, the devotion to country, the heroism on the field of battle, the skill in military achievements of the Grand Army of the Republic were not surpassed by the armies of Alexander, Caesar or Napoleon. From Sumter to Appomattox every battlefield is strewn with the bones of valiant sons of the North, whose love of country led them to lay down their lives that this Nation might be preserved for succeeding generations. A million noble lives were thus sacrificed that we of a later generation might enjoy the blessings of peace under a preserved Federal government. Small indeed the tribute which we can pay to their memories, but let us never forget the sacrifices which they made. With a valor that was Spartan, with a devotion to the cause of the Union that was patriotic, with a leadership that was gallant and of the highest order, in the Wilderness, at Gettysburg and elsewhere, the Union volunteer soldiers achieved for themselves and the nation imperishable fame.

If Lodi, Austerlitz and Waterloo be memorable events in European history, what shall be said of Gettysburg, Winchester and Chancellorsville in American history? "There repose the precious offerings laid upon the altar of the country by the loyal States." On every battlefield sleep many unknown dead:

"Up many a fortress wall
They charged, those Boys in Blue,
'Mid surging smoke and volleying ball,
The bravest were the first to fall —
To fall for me and you."

In speaking of the illustrious dead who had fallen in the Peloponnesian War, Pericles said: "Methinks that a death such as theirs has been, gives the true measure of a man's worth; it may be the first revelation of his virtues, but is at any rate their final seal * * *. They resigned to hope their unknown chance of happiness; but in the face of death they resolved to rely upon themselves alone. And when the moment came they were minded to resist and suffer rather than to fly and save their lives: They ran away from the word of dishonor, but on the battlefield their feet stood fast: and in an instant, at the height of their fortune they passed away from the scene, not of their fear but of their glory. Such was the end of these men; they were worthy of Athens, and the living need not desire to have a more heroic spirit, although they may pray for a less fatal issue. The value of such a spirit is not to be expressed in words."

From that period to the present, all nations have erected costly memorials and paid reverential homage to the memories of those who have fallen in the defense of their country. We should therefore make our Memorial Day not only one of tribute to the memories of those who fell in defense of the Union, but the occasion for the inculcation of patriotism and the love of our institutions. The fast disappearing ranks of distinguished veterans of the Civil War point to but one conclusion, and that is that the Grand Army of the Republic will soon exist only in precious memory. When the distinguished veterans of the

Grand Army of the Republic who are present here to-day are no more, the school children who have participated in these exercises will remember this as one of the most memorable of any of the scenes that they have ever witnessed.

The school children who formed a part of the Living Shield on the occasion of the National Encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic in Buffalo, in 1897, will not soon forget the 50,000 veterans of the Civil War, constituting the grandest pageant ever witnessed in this city, as they marched up Main street, over Chippewa to Delaware, and up Delaware, headed by President William McKinley, who, in one of his speeches during the Encampment, said: "Blessed is that country whose defenders are patriots. Blessed is that country whose soldiers fight for it and are willing to give the best they have, the best that any man has, their own lives, to preserve it because they love it. Such an army the United States has always commanded in every crisis of her history. From the War of the Revolution to the late Civil War, the men followed that flag in battle because they loved that flag and believed in what it represented. That was the stuff of which the Volunteer Army of '61 was made. Every one of them not only fought, but they thought. Many of them did their own thinking, and did not always agree with their Commanders." As the President's carriage passed down Chippewa street 2,000 school children sang "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, the Boys are Marching." With voices full and strong they kept up that song until the President approached the stand, and looked up at the beautiful picture, lifted his hat again and again and smiled at them. The children in one body then rose to their feet and cheered the President, Governor Black and Commander Clarkson.

It was a grand, magnificent sight to witness the blue-garbed heroes as they marched up Delaware avenue. Thousands of spectators thronged the avenue and waved the Stars and Stripes as a tribute of honor to the men who had saved the Union from dismemberment. Such a spectacle had never been witnessed in Buffalo, and its impressiveness will never be forgotten by those who saw it. In the procession were such distinguished veterans as Col. Alger, Secretary of War, Col. Pingree, Gen. Lew

Wallace, Gen. Sickles and many others. New York had 12,000 veterans in the line, and the G. A. R. Posts of Buffalo had over 800 men in line. The procession was five hours and forty-five minutes in passing a given point, and not until the last strains of the Battle Hymn of the Republic had died away after the last column had passed in review, did the 250,000 spectators along the streets of Buffalo disperse to their homes.

The National Encampments of the Grand Army of the Republic have since the Civil War formed most notable assemblages, and have left an enduring impression upon the rising generation. The annual camp-fires, military parades and reunions of military organizations bring together such of the distinguished veterans as are able to be in attendance from various parts of the Union, to rehearse again and again the stirring events of the late Civil War, whose story is the most thrilling and pathetic of any recorded in history. A million or more were engaged on either side, and the killed and wounded at Cold Harbor, Chancellorsville, Chickamauga, Corinth, Gettysburg, Petersburg, during the Seven Days Retreat in Virginia, Shiloh, Vicksburg, Spottsylvania, Fredericksburg, the Wilderness, and elsewhere, numbered thousands, and some of these approaching the losses of any other military engagement in the history of the world. This extraordinary sacrifice of human life was made to preserve this Government, which President Lincoln declared "Cannot endure permanently half slave and half free."

In his masterful Gettysburg dedicatory address President Lincoln voiced the loftiest patriotism and the deep pulsations of the National heart throbbing in sympathy with thousands in the loyal North, whose loved ones had fallen there and on other battlefields of the Civil War. He keenly felt what a sacrifice they had made in giving for their country their "last full measure of devotion" to its perpetuity.

That address is as sympathetic as the Funeral Oration of Pericles, and will be read in commemoration of the devotion of the soldiers of the Civil War as long as this Nation endures. Lincoln, Seward, Stanton, Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, Hancock, Thomas, Meade, Logan, Hooker,

Farragut, Morris and others who served their country so patiently, so ably, so valiantly, during the long struggle, are now among the immortals whose names are household words, loved and revered by all. How precious are their memories, how thrilling were their lives, how imperishable their achievements! The Boys in Blue, who marched and fought and conquered and died on a thousand or more battlefields, down the Mississippi, up the Atlantic Coast, and elsewhere, are not forgotten, for

“ On Fame’s eternal camping ground
Their silent tents are spread,
And Glory guards with solemn round,
The bivouac of the dead.”

On every great battlefield of the Civil War are erected monuments in testimony of the heroic devotion of those who fell while in the service of their country:

“ Nor shall their glory be forgot
While Fame her record keeps,
Or Honor points the hallowed spot
Where valor proudly sleeps.
Nor wreck, nor change, nor winter’s blight,
Nor Time’s remorseless doom,
Can dim one ray of holy light
That gilds their glorious tomb.”

The State of New York sent into the field nearly 200 regiments of infantry, in addition to its cavalry, artillery, sailors and marines, comprising all together 482,313 men, of whom upwards of 35,000 were sailors and marines, 4,125 colored troops, and the aggregate number of deaths was 46,534. Several regiments of infantry, cavalry and artillery were organized and went into the field from Erie county. The Comrades in attendance upon this occasion for the most part were members of some of those regiments, and fortunate are we to have them with us, inculcating the principles of patriotism in the truest sense, in this commercial age, when love of country is sometimes forgotten in the fierce competition of business or in the desire to acquire riches.

Their presence, however, should be a constant reminder of their loyalty and devotion to their country, which they placed above everything else, when laying aside all else they responded to their country's call, and went forth to battle for the perpetuity of the Nation. Such devotion, such loyalty, such consecration on the part of the veterans of the late Civil War is the strongest testimony they could give of their faith in this Free Republic and the duty devolving upon all classes to preserve it at all hazards, in whatsoever form its perpetuity be endangered. We should reverently cherish the memories of those who have passed to that ever-growing City of the Dead, and let pass no opportunity to render such services as are possible to the living of those distinguished Union Armies that comprised the Flower of American Manhood, the loyal sons of nearly every hearthstone in this broad land of ours.

Some will remember the high standing and exemplary character of the men as they left their homes in regiments commanded by distinguished citizens in various parts of the country, to join the Union Armies, and how they, without reward or the hope of reward, other than the satisfaction that comes to one in the consciousness of duty well performed, endured the hardships of military life and braved the deadly onslaught of many battles, that this Republic, founded on the immutable principles of eternal justice, might not perish from the earth. Many of such left their homes and loved ones never to return; others after years of service in the most deadly war of modern times, weakened by disease and the hardships of military life, or maimed in battle, returned to spend their remaining years with their loved ones in the North. These constitute the Grand Army of the Republic. As the years pass the number of these veterans is perceptibly diminishing, but there is a growing desire amid the grateful people of the Nation to honor these distinguished warriors who heroically saved the country in one of its greatest crises. All honor to the Boys in Blue, who springing to the defense of their country in the hour of its supreme peril, and with a devotion to country as consecrated as any that ever actuated the heart of man, amid the shot and shell and storm of many deadly battles, more destructive than that of Austerlitz or Waterloo,

saved the Union from the dismemberment which threatened it! May their names be inscribed among the Immortals and the school children of this and succeeding generations taught to revere the names of those who thus preserved the Nation.

Comrades, you have won the undying gratitude of your countrymen. You have achieved imperishable fame. You have saved the Nation, and made possible the blessings of free government to generations yet unborn.

As oft as the Memorial Day returns a grateful and a free people will strew the graves of your departed comrades with immortelles, and rear monuments as tributes to their memory, which are thus beautifully described by the poet Henry Van Dyke:

“Count not the cost of honor to the dead!
The tribute that a mighty Nation pays
To those who loved her well in former days
Means more than gratitude for glories fled;
For every noble man that she hath bred,
Immortalized by art's immortal praise,
Lives in the bronze and marble that we raise,
To lead our sons as he our father's led.
These monuments of manhood, brave and high,
Do more than forts or battle-ships to keep
Our dear-bought liberty. They fortify
The heart of youth with valor wise and deep;
They build eternal bulwarks, to command
Eternal strength to guide our native land.”

This sentiment is well nigh universal and has already found stately and appropriate expression in monuments to our heroic dead at Gettysburg, Chattanooga, Arlington and elsewhere. These are eloquent testimonials to their loyalty and will inspire to like achievement generations of your sturdy countrymen, who place manhood above greed, patriotism above sensationalism, love of country above a disregard of its institutions and who cherish a profound regard for our Republican form of government, founded at great cost of life and treasure, wherein civil and religious liberty under law is guaranteed as our priceless heritage. In the solution of the grave problems of self-

government in the future, the duty devolves on your successors, as that enjoined upon Roman magistrates in compliance with the political maxim, "*Videant consules . . . ne quid detrimenti capiat Respublica*" to see to it that this Republic suffer no harm from enemies within or without its confines, howsoever insidious their attacks may be. In your unflinching devotion to the cause of the Union in the hour of its supreme peril, you and your comrades have exalted citizenship and left for those coming after you an exemplification of genuine patriotism worthy of emulation by all who would have this Republic endure.

